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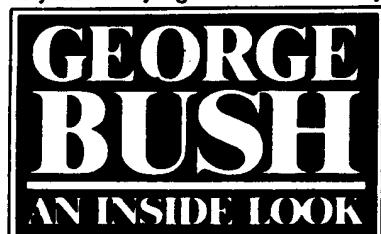
'Poppy,' hero of the family, takes aim at '88

First of four parts

By Barnard L. Collier
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When Jonathan Bush was 7 years old in 1938, he thrilled with pride to see his baseball player brother, George, 14 — known to all as "Poppy" — marching around the dining room table with his chums from Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., singing the school song.

In World War II in the Pacific theater, George was an 18-year-old flying officer in the Navy, the youngest fighter



plane. He also reveled in something almost all Bush family members prize: a good time.

At home in the rambling wooden house in Greenwich, Conn., Jonathan, then 11, was overjoyed by George's occasional letter from the war.

"I still see him — if I can get real corny but truthful — as a hero," said Jonathan, now a 54-year-old investment broker, of George Herbert Walker Bush, 61, now the vice president of the United States.

When Lt. j.g. Bush returned from the Pacific at Christmas 1944, he married an 18-year-old knockout from Rye, N.Y., named Barbara Pierce. Her father was the publisher of McCall's magazine. Jonathan Bush recalls

her as "peculiarly beautiful, with great big eyes and gorgeous hair."

Moreover, Jonathan realized, "She was wild about him. And for George, if anyone wants to be wild about him, it's fine with him."

Today, four decades later, George Bush, the second son of Prescott Bush of Greenwich, Conn., and Dorothy Walker of St. Louis, intends to find out how many Americans may be even mildly wild about him.

If Mr. Bush becomes president of the United States, either by succession or by popular election, the American people will have a chief

executive officer who sought the job with a barely concealed passion, and who believes he can do it better than anybody on the national scene.

Mr. Bush is aware that in a national election in 1988, provided he wraps up the Republican nomination, he must beat big historical odds: No vice president has become president by election, unless he has earlier succeeded to the Oval Office because of the president's death, in the last 37 presidential election campaigns, the last one being Martin Van Buren.

He must also limit the number of his doubters and detractors, who interpret Mr. Bush's ambition — which he tends to emphasize by his zeal in underplaying it — as unseemly and perhaps dangerous in an American political leader.

Some of the accusations against Mr. Bush by sharpshooters on the Republican right puzzle him and his admirers. In addition to the venial sins of ambition and naivete, he is commonly charged with the mortal sins of being a "wimp," an elitist, too easily influenced by moderate opinions, too trusting of the communists and their ilk, a preppie, a "good No. 2 man," a blue blood and a man who is "on the Right, but not of the Right."

From his political left, the barbs are more snide. The snidest have come from cartoonist Garry Trudeau in his "Doonesbury" strip. One episode suggested that by faithfully representing and promoting the policies and philosophies of President Reagan he had, willingly, "put his manhood in trust."

But George Bush, it is often said by his loved ones, kinfolk and friends, "knows who and what he is." Moreover, he resists and refuses to be repackaged in ways political marketers predict will be more palatable to a larger public.

One thing Mr. Bush surely is: He is a man who carefully is planning to be the next president.

Before a large luncheon audience recently in Los Angeles, he responded to a point-blank question from the floor about his presidential future by saying: "I'll try to give you a serious non-answer."

What he answered, with a confidential grin, was:

"I know what is beating in my breast. And if you ask Mrs. Bush, she does, too."

The listeners laughed, and his poetic message sank in.

For now, Mr. Bush's personal respect for Ronald Reagan will keep him working as diligently and unob-

trusively as possible in the background. He will neither contradict nor question the president nor his policies in front of anyone but Mr. Reagan himself — they meet for half an hour at 9 each morning. He rarely will take credit for missions he has accomplished or international deals he has cut.

But then, after the 1986 congressional elections, he intends to come right out and shout what early-bird campaign buttons are already saying:

"Bush for President!"

The question of what makes George Bush run is a significant one.

President Lyndon Johnson used to say, "If you want to know what moves a man, find out what his father failed at."

In a recent interview, Mr. Bush recalled his father:

"Yes, he did fail once. In 1950, he failed to be elected to the United States Senate from Connecticut. We [his family] never looked at it that way. But he set his sights to win. You fail in a match if you lose it. If it's important enough you do feel failure. If it's 'one more experience in life; you don't.'"

Mr. Bush is widely known in and out of political circles as a tenacious competitor. He recalls that in the past he was "goal oriented," which translated into unbridled energy and raw determination to get where he was going and to grasp what he wanted.

After the Navy, he zipped through Yale, making Phi Beta Kappa, in just 2½ years. He tore into the world of business with a similar ferocity.

"But now, as I get older," he said, "I have become mellow. Just ask any of my brothers. They'll agree to that."

He has reluctantly begun to reveal more of himself and his personal life to some reporters. He hopes this will serve to satisfy public curiosity, although it violates a personal tenet, taught by his mother, "not to speak too much of one's self."

There are signs, too, that he is watching Ronald Reagan's consummate communication methods with studious attention, and learning something about speech making that will be politically profitable to him.

To some lengths, however, he will not go.

Take his watchband, for example.

He wears a Timex watch with a blue and red striped cloth watchband on his right wrist.